nied, though not necessarily. Puerperal fever, though generally sporadic, was now and then epidemic; and when epidemic, sometimes seemed to be contagious also. It would be well in practice to act on the possibility of contagiousness, though the kind of reasoning brought to establish it, might prove the same of almost any other disease. In an epidemic some years ago, while attending eleven cases of labor, four patients, nowise connected, had puerperal fever. In these cases there was evidence sufficient to satisfy his own mind that there was a period of incubation beginning before the labor. At any rate, the circumstances were such as to preclude the idea that he carried the disease to these four; and others whom he attended at the same time received no harm. If a practitioner must give up further attendance on the occurrence of a case of puerperal fever, in strict logic he must abandon such practice altogether, as the proper time for return to it could not be stated, for even after a year's absence a first case on resumption has been followed by this disease.. Nevertheless this was not too great a sacrifice, were the necessity evident. But cases of puerperal fever were almost always present in large communities, coming without known cause, and entirely disconnected with each other; and not communicated, though as a general rule little or no caution was taken. A succession of cases in an individual's private practice is of rarest occurrence; if anything, more rare than in other diseases beyond suspicion of contagiousness or of being conveyable by attendants. In Vienna a long interval of exemption, since interrupted, was attributed to the customs, spoken of today, which had been adopted there; while in other places a similar exemption was ascribed to segregation and fresh air. Every practicable precaution should be attended to. A filthy doctor was an abomination not to be tolerated at any time. Many agents are loosely called disinfectants. Some of these are deodorizers, and very useful as such; while others leave as bad odors and as irrespirable airs as those for whose removal they are employed. And of what avail is the addition of smoke, of any kind? Such a thing as a true disinfectant, one that will destroy disease or its "germs," is unknown. Besides, as Dr. Proctor says, "there is no evidence to show that any infectious disease is of necessity associated with odorous matter."—(*Monthly Med. Rep.*, No. III., p. 199.)

Erysipelas is a dangerous complication, as much so for a parturient patient as for one recently amputated; and from somewhat analogous reasons. He had known, however, the external organs to be invaded by erysipelas immediately after labor without inducing puerperal fever in the patient herself, or affecting injuriously another in an adjoining bed. A prominent teacher recently declared to the British Association that in private practice two thirds of the cases of puerperal fever arose from scarlatina, and in hospitals the same proportion from erysipelas. Probably there can be adduced as good arguments for the one statement as for the other, and yet neither be true. An association of diseases, however frequent, is not positive proof of their identity, or of their being causes one of the other. We do not often hear of puerperal fever producing scarlet fever or erysipelas, which we should, were the diseases convertible. Some diseases generally appear in connection with each other, but it is not usual, if it be possible, for a disease to begin as one thing, and then "run into," become, and end as, another and quite a different disease.

The various allegations alluded to, whether hitherto proven or not, and the proof rests with those who make them, should exact the greatest caution of practitioners, and stimulate to further and more accurate investigations.

At 2, P. M., the Society adjourned.

Bibliographical Notices.

Handbook of Diseases of the Eye, their Pathology and Treatment. By A. SALOMONS, M.D., Fellow of the Massachusetts Medical Society, &c. Boston: James Campbell. 1870.

A USEFUL handbook of ophthalmology, substantially correct in its statements, and published in an attractive form. It gives an intelligible *resumé* of the principal affections of the eye and the chief operations to be undertaken in this department of surgery. The author exhibits a remarkable power of condensation, as examples of which we would point to the article on diphtheria and the section on accommodation and refraction.

The typographical errors are more annoying than numerous; sometimes, however, might lead to a serious misunderstanding, as in the statement (page 1) that the mirror of the ophthalmoscope is ordinarily convex.

On the whole, this little work is well adapted to fulfil its purpose of giving the student a table of contents of the science of ophthalmology, and serving him as a general guide book to the country he must himself explore. H. D.

Medical and Surgical Journal.

BOSTON: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 1870.

NOTES ON CURRENT TOPICS.

Phrenological Materialism.—On pages 196 and 197 of the *Journal of Psychological Medicine* for January we find these words:

"This work on Phrenology [a book by James P. Browne, M.D., of Edinburgh] brings to mind the one great thing that must be said in favor of this so-called science. The division, excited by many of the books on this subject, is apt to prevent the reader from giving the credit that is due to the results achieved by the many scientific men who at one time and another have been favorable to the central idea around which the phrenological doctrine is grouped. It is mainly to the labors of those who have inculcated the doctrine of the localization of faculties, that the metaphysical conception of mind, as an entity separated from and at continual variance with matter, has become a thing of the past, and in its place substituted the conception of a force developed from and dependent on the changes induced in a material substratum, the brain. For their timely aid in achieving so great a work, not only in popular but in professional opinion, scientific men are their debtors, and it is but just that, in condemning their errors, we should accord credit to whatever of truth may be found in their system.

"No fact is more certain than that a living brain, normal in size and supplied with a due amount of good blood, will manifest the phenomena of healthy mind, and that the moral and emotional qualities of this mind will be the resultant of the conditions under which the brain is developed and surrounded. In other words, were it possible to accurately determine and appreciate the circumstances that have surrounded an individual, as well as the hereditary predisposition he possessed, his character could be determined with as much accuracy as an eclipse can be predicted."

That is to say, a man's character is the resultant of the hereditary and surrounding influences appertaining to him. "I will! I choose"! are a sufficient refutation of the statement. The metaphysical argument in opposition to it is as impregnable now as it ever was. The innate idea of mind developed in every form of civilization, through all history, is not to be blotted out by a few theorists, who think to deny its existence because the scalpel does not find it in dissecting dead nerve fibres, or because the microscope does not detect it among nerve cells. We have previously written upon this point; and will therefore now confine ourselves to the remark that anatomy and physiology do well when they deal only with objective investigations on the formation and the phenomena of the body, and leave the subjective manifestations of the mental essence to the domain of metaphysics.

Another Phase of Heredity.—In the notice we have before given of late papers which have discussed the subject of heredity, we have failed to discover much that is new save in the matter of sex-digitism so-called. Beside some slight allusion to the recent theory that the alleged pernicious results of consanguineous marriages are due to the breeding in and concentration of previously exciting hereditary taints instead of the creation of new ones, little or nothing is advanced which has not been set forth before, and fresh collections of facts are not adduced to confirm the old. The most striking original theory on this head which we have met with of late, is in a work of *fiction*. "Many a truth is said in jest" is applicable to its author; and we also strongly suspect that in a romantic garb our Professor of Physiology has clothed an interesting fact relative to hereditary transmission. We refer to the remarkable book called "The Guardian Angel." Turning aside entirely from the controversial theology of this story, which latter we cannot too much admire for its strength and beauty, we call attention by a word only to the physiological thesis propounded in it.

The heroine is made to inherit from her ancestors on one side tendencies toward those virtues which are the source of dignity, safety and repose; but also qualities